

'88 drought chronology

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The drought of 1988 did not start with the record temperatures set last week.

Nor did it start with the 40-day completely dry spell in Madison that ended with 0.11 of an inch of rain Wednesday.

The drought began in February, when precipitation for the month was below normal and has continued through today.

Here is a chronological list of Madison's weather so far this year:

■ **January** — So far, this is the only month this year in which the actual precipitation has exceeded the normal. Madison had 1.82 inches of precipitation in January, 0.71 of an inch more than the normal of 1.11 inches.

■ **February** — Madison's below-normal precipitation began with 0.46 of an inch, 0.56 of an inch below the normal of 1.02 inches.

■ **March** — Precipitation was 0.15 of an inch above normal for the year going into the month; at the end, Madison was 0.8 of an inch below normal. The normal precipitation for the month is 2.15 inches; only 1.2 inches was recorded.

■ **April** — April showers bring May flowers, but this year's showers were a bit light. Precipitation measured 2.65 inches for the month, 0.45 of an inch below normal.

■ **May** — It was time to notice the problem. Only 0.92 of an inch of rain fell, 2.42 inches below normal for the month and 3.67 inches below normal for the year.

■ **May 8** — Besides being Mother's Day, this was the last day a significant amount of rain fell on Madison — 0.56 of an inch. It was also memorable for the number of tornado sightings throughout southern Wisconsin. Dane County had four confirmed sightings.

■ **May 12** — Madison's last measurable rain of 0.02 of an inch until scattered showers fell throughout the area last week.

■ **May 25** — As if dry weather was not enough, Madison set a record low temperature of 30 degrees, with frost killing corn and newly-planted gardens in some areas. The previous record for that date was 34 degrees in 1970.

■ **May 31** — High temperatures continued, resulting in more electricity being used by Madison residents than on any other previous day in May since Madison Gas and Electric Co. began keeping records. Madison's Water Utility manager, Gery Graham, asked residents to water their lawns before 10 a.m. or after 8 p.m. on odd-numbered days if they live at odd-numbered addresses and even-numbered days if they live at even-numbered addresses.

■ **June** — Unless we get rain this week, Madison is heading towards the driest June on record. That 0.11 of an inch has been it. Total rainfall for Madison this year is 7.16 inches, 6.41 inches below the normal of 13.57. The driest June recorded since the city began keeping records in 1869 was 0.59 inches in 1895.

■ **June 1** — The Dane County Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service committee voted to ask for federal permission so that farmers could cut hay on 936,000 acres of land set aside in acreage reduction programs.

■ **June 15** — The DNR announced an outdoor burning ban for areas in 43 counties due to concern that a "killer fire" could strike.

■ **June 16** — The Dane County Board passed a sweeping ban on outdoor fires — including cigarettes — in all cities, villages and towns in the county as an emergency response to the drought which has raised the danger of grass fires and forest fires. Each ordinance violation results in a \$100 to \$500 fine.

■ **June 17** — Madison's 35-day stretch without rain set a record for the longest dry spell since record keeping began in 1869. The DNR issued 92 permits to farmers in Madison-area counties to use water from rivers or creeks to irrigate their parched crops.

■ **June 19** — Fires increased as dry conditions turned grass brittle. Robert Focht, a forest ranger with the DNR, said Sauk, Columbia and Dane counties usually report about 60 fires each year. Since January, the districts have reported 120 fires.

■ **June 20** — The first day of summer hit a record high of 101 degrees. The previous record for the date was 97 degrees in 1933.

■ **June 21** — Madison simmered through another record high temperature for the date of 100 degrees. The previous record was 94 degrees in 1956. The two-day highs marked the first time since the weather service began collecting data that temperatures hit 100 on two consecutive days in June. As for the farmers, the U.S. Department of Agriculture gave approval to harvest set-aside acres.

■ **June 22** — A third record high temperature was set at 96 degrees. The previous record for the date was 94 degrees in 1911. After 40 dry days, Madison finally received some rain. But 0.11 inches barely wet a few hatless heads. Crops, forests and rivers need at least a couple of inches to recover, according to the National Weather Service.

■ **June 24** — Friday morning's trace of rain sizzled away almost as it fell as the temperature climbed to a non-record of 91.

■ **June 25** — Madison set its fourth record high temperature in one week with a high of 97 degrees, breaking the record for that date of 96 set in 1954. This week's heat also set a record by breaking four daily heat records in one week.